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The Chastisement of War, and its Alleviations.

The Chastisement of War, and its Alleviations:

A

THANKSGIVING SERMON

PREACHED IN

CHRIST M. E. CHURCH,

PITTSBURGH,

ON

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1862.

BY

REV. WM. A. SNIVELY,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

PITTSBURGH:

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1862.

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PITTSBURGH, November 27th, 1862.

Rev. WM. A. SNIVELY:

Dear Sir—Your Sermon on Thanksgiving Day was listened to with pleasure. Its eloquent and patriotic sentiments will encourage all loyal hearts to see blessings—present and prospective—amid the apparent calamities of war. In this critical juncture of our Nation's life, the Government needs and expects a generous support from every lover of his country and race in all the efforts now putting forth to crush a mad and wicked rebellion against its benignant sway. Every interest of humanity, civilization and religion demands that it stops short of no sacrifice which will secure its triumph in this contest. Believing that your Sermon will help all who read it to bear more cheerfully the burdens of a war waged in behalf of free government and liberal principles, we respectfully request of you a copy for publication.

Very truly, your humble servants, &c.

JOHN MOORHEAD,	R. E. SELLERS,	ALLEN KRAMER,
W. VANKIRK,	SAML. M. KIER,	W. M'CUTCHEON,
A. BRADLEY,	G. METZGAR,	JOS. HORNE,
HARRY SHIRLLS,	THOS. LITTLE, SR.	N. HOLMES,
JAMES BENNEY, JR.	JNO. FULLERTON,	H. T. COFFEY,
S. B. M'ELROY,	J. C. NORTHROP,	F. SELLERS,
ED. H. GARDNER,	JAMES N. KEAN,	J. W. BARKER.
SAM. GRAY,		

CHRIST CHURCH, November 29, 1862.

Messrs. H. T. COFFEY, JNO. MOORHEAD, ALLEN KRAMER, and others:

Dear Brethren—The object of my discourse on Thanksgiving Day was to strengthen our hearts in support of the Government, and to demonstrate the fact that even amid the calamities of war there is abundant cause for gratitude to God.

If that object can be better subserved by its publication, I cheerfully place the manuscript at your disposal.

Very truly, your Pastor,

WM. A. SNIVELY.

SERMON.

"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Heb. xii. 11.

It has been customary in the American pulpit to make Thanksgiving Day an occasion for the utterance of patriotic sentiment and exultant declamation. Coming, as it does, in the middle of the week, and set apart, as it is, for festivity, the day has been seized upon as a fitting time in which the minister might overstep the ordinary limitations of pulpit discourse, and tear away from the straight-laced conventionality in which he is ordinarily bound. The result has been a very liberal parading of the American eagle, and even, as Emerson says, of that more dangerous bird, the American peacock, too. Hail Columbia has been the theme, and the most

magnificent destinies have been logically prophesied for the American people.

These were the amusements and recreations of peace. But sterner facts look us in the face to-day. A shade of sadness tempers the gayety of the thanksgiving scene, and a deeper solemnity pervades the hearts of a thanksgiving congregation. Nero fiddled while Rome was burning, but it would ill become a Christian man to degrade his national day of gratitude into an occasion of thoughtless vaporing, of wordy patriotism, or of idle mirth. While the hand on the dial-plate of time is moving with such tremendous strides, it behooves us rather to pause and reverently to listen, for in doing so we shall hear the footsteps of God.

We stand face to face, to-day, with the sternest and most awful fact of a nation's life—the fact of civil war; and, therefore, we must be sober. But, also, we are no cowards upon the one hand, nor infidels upon the other—and therefore we may rejoice. If we feared to meet the issues of our national life, as we should do if we were cowards; or if we had no trust in God, as we should not if we were infidels, then this day would be, indeed, a day of gloom, and our thanksgiving would be a mockery. But a

nation that trusts in God, and is not afraid to defend the right, may pause even amid the disasters of war and the work of death, to remember that there is a God, who presides over the destinies of nations, and to thank him for his care.

In looking for the special causes of thanksgiving which we are to remember to-day, all hearts naturally turn to our national life. But we shall speak of this last, this morning—though, indeed, the virus of war has so entered into the very life-blood of the nation, that it will inevitably be the undertone of every suggestion and the modifying power of every fact. Let us rather commence, however, in the narrower circle of our own domestic and community life, to discern, if we may, the tokens of God's kindness and care with which he has surrounded us here; and then we may pass to the wider sphere of our nation's life and trial and work.

To gain some clear conception of our present actual position as a people, let us suppose that an intelligent and discriminating foreigner should be suddenly placed in our midst. We will suppose that he has not read the newspapers of the last eighteen months, and that his chief knowledge of the American people consists in the fact that west

of the Atlantic there is a great and growing nation, which, though not a century old, stands as a first-class power in the earth, and which is thus already a giant in its youth. The first thought that would present itself to his mind, would doubtless be the wonderful activity of our life, and the unequaled prosperity that surrounds us. He would see no beggars in the streets, and but few idlers on the corners; everywhere around him would be the signs of a busy and working people. As he comes to investigate the statistics of our commerical wealth, he would see men absorbed in business, and making money with a speed they never made it before. In our domestic life, he would see women—wives and mothers—as contented and happy as ever Roman matron might hope to be. As he passes from place to place, he would see rail road trains fairly breaking down under the immense tides of freight and travel that pass over them ; and amid all this prosperity and wealth, the only singular fact that would strike his observation as not being in harmony with the general appearance of things, would be, that here and there, and, indeed, everywhere, he should see men clad in the uniform and bearing the weapons of a soldier's life. He asks an explanation of the

fact—Are these the police of the nation?—when, to his utter surprise, he is informed that we are in the midst of a civil war. He would at first conclude that our civil war must be a very small affair. He is informed that a million of men are fighting for the Government, and three-quarters of a million are in rebellion against it—that this loyal part of the country is now sustaining a blockade of thousands of miles of sea-coast—and that its line of pickets extends from the Atlantic to the Mississippi.

You may well imagine the astonishment with which such a statement would be received. "Why," he would answer, "I have read of civil war, and its outward token has been desolated villages and cities wrapped in flames, children put to torture and women to shame; and where the tread of contending armies has gone, there homes have been deserted, business prostrated—suffering and even famine have come, and death has held his carnival. There must be some mistake." "No," you reply, "it is true. Thrice three hundred thousand of our brothers are already in the field, and before the death-struggle of the Government comes, thrice three hundred thousand more are willing to go; and, to let you behind the scene in our domestic life, there is not a village

nor a hamlet in the land in which there is not a Rachel mourning for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not."

You may imagine, again, that man's astonishment as he sees such prosperity and abundance standing side by side with the dread and terrible fact of *war*. And yet that stranger's astonishment should be the standard of our gratitude to-day; and our reflections, to be adequate to the occasion, must commence at this point. We must bring ourselves to realize, if we can, that notwithstanding the presence of war, the greater part of our national dominion is as prosperous and happy as ever it has been. The area of the rebellion is suffering, indeed, in an exhausted land and in the almost starvation prices of the few accessible necessaries of life; and it is getting only what it might have anticipated, and that not as much as it richly deserves.

A broad belt of border territory—the wheat-fields of Virginia, the pasture-lands of Kentucky and the plains of Missouri—are paying to-day the penalty of a miserable neutral policy, and their refusal of hearty support to the Government; but the loyal territory of the United States is comparatively prosperous and happy. England, with her silent cotton-

mills and starving operatives, is suffering more from this war to-day than *we* are, ourselves.

I have heard men profanely say within the past fortnight, What have we to be thankful for? Rather let us ask, What is there of which we should complain? What is there that we really need, of which we have not an abundance? Why, even the stringency of our commerical affairs, and the prospect of heavy taxes as internal revenue, has hardly begun to trench upon our luxuries as yet, much less upon the necessaries of life. Your tables and your wardrobes, your ledgers and your bank accounts, will tell of anything but stringency and want; and the very scarcity of coin is itself the proof that there is an abundance of it somewhere, and that it is only out of circulation because it is held in reserve for future exigencies.

The prosperity of the American people during the last eighteen months—the immense resources and inventions of war which they have developed—the activity of their business life at the same time, the success of their agricultural interests, and withal their cheerfulness and buoyancy and faith amid the inevitable reverses of their arms—will stand out as the paradox of history in the future; and it is to-

day the grandest demonstration the world has ever seen, of our greatness as a people, and of the resources with which God has endowed us.

I suppose it would scarcely be necessary to stop here to prove that the present war is a chastisement of God for our national sins. Jehovah's four sore scourges for a rebellious people are these—Plague, Famine, Earthquake and War. There are times in every nation's life, when God unsheaths the sword, either to carve its destiny or to execute its doom.

It is a recognized principle of history, that nations receive the punishment of their sins in the present world. This is necessary to the perfect administration of the Divine Government, as nations have no organic existence in the world to come. Their virtue and their sin are therefore rewarded or punished here, and thus the page of history becomes God's record of a nation's goodness or a nation's crime. Now, if the present war is thus a chastisement of God, two things are certain. First, that it must be so universal in its effects as to be recognized as such; and second, that its practical recognition as such should be fraught with suffering and distress. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." And the fact that de-

mands our profoundest gratitude to-day, is this—that God has sent the ministry of suffering and distress so gently in our midst, and that the very rod with which he has chastised us, has been tempered in its strokes by love.

Now there are three methods by which the fact of war as a chastisement of God is brought home distinctly and directly to every individual. They are, by actual participation in, or contact with, the war; or, by the loss of friends and brothers; or, by bearing the inevitable financial burden of the war, whose most unwelcome shape is taxes. And by one of these three methods God is bringing home the war to every man, woman and child in the land. And yet, in the mercy of God, each of these methods of applying the chastisement of war to us, is fraught with mitigations that more than half relieve them of their terrible sting. Even in our chastisements, God is tempering judgment with mercy.

Our brethren in arms, for example, are braving the shock of the war. They have left weeping hearts at home, to brave the fatigues of the camp and the dangers of the field. Tenderly-reared youths share with brawny men the hardships of a soldier's life; and they who in childhood could scarcely go to

rest without a mother's watchful care, have learned to sleep on the hard ground beneath the autumn frost and the early winter's snow, on the banks of the Potomac. They have cheerfully accepted a life which for hardship and lack of comfort is far more severe than that of even the criminals in our penitentiary, and with it the dread possibility that each reveille which calls them from their rest, may be the last they shall ever hear on earth.

And yet, hard as the lot appears to be, there are alleviations connected with it which make even the hardship sweet. Never have soldiers had such inspirations as the army of the Union has. All that is glorious in the past—all that is precious in the present—all that is bright and hopeful in the future, centre in the cause to which they have pledged their lives. Why was it that, before the Government had exhausted the patriotism of the people, thousands and tens of thousands were begging simply the *privilege* of fighting for the Union? Why did men rush to the life of arms and the death of battle, with an enthusiasm that was little less than heroic? It was because the patriotic instincts of the nation had been aroused. The fires of the Revolution, which had slumbered in many hearts, burst forth

anew when the hour of danger came, and the occasion demonstrated that the American people could fight as well as boast. And the treasured inspirations of a sacred past—the memories of Lexington, and Bunker Hill, and Valley Forge—the very dignity of American citizenship, combined to make sacrifice for the nation heroic, and death itself sublime.

In regard to actual contact with the war, and immunity from it, there is this singular fact—that no district of our country that has been staunchly loyal has suffered from the actual presence of war. The only possible exception to this is East Tennessee, and even there the poison of the rebellion had spread so fearfully as to make the minority desperate, and even to necessitate the innocent to suffer with the guilty.

The States that have wavered in their allegiance have reaped their reward in desolated homes and down-trodden fields, and in the shock of arms that has brought distress, if not death, into every household. Virginia, once the mother of Presidents, has fallen so low, that there are "none so poor to do her reverence" now. She consented to be the cat's-paw of Southern conspirators, and of course she could only be burnt. Kentucky, with her hunters and her

riflemen—with the memories of Daniel Boone and his fearless companions, occupies to-day a humiliating position before the world. With all her bravery, she has done just nothing to support the Government; and while in other wars the names of her sons have been written high in the roll of fame, to-day they are, with but a few glorious exceptions, unmentioned and unknown. And why? Because the youth of Kentucky embarked in the rebellion, and hundreds of the Union men who staid at home had an "if" to their loyalty; and when the Government was struggling for its very life, and the Capital itself was threatened, Kentucky—O! shame—would forsooth be neutral. And she has her reward. Missouri—divided, torn and broken from the first—is little better than a wilderness now; and even Maryland is paralyzed in her commerce, as if in punishment for her connivance with rebellion and her apology for wrong. And the singular fact is patent to every thinking man, that no heartily loyal part of the country has been visited by the actual presence of war.

Is there nothing to be thankful for in this? Is it nothing, that your homes are safe—your business undisturbed—your city untouched by fire or sword?

Is it nothing, that your fears have not been realized that the enemy's cannon should be planted on the summit of the hills that command your city? Is it nothing, that your fields have borne a more than average crop; and that your wives and children have not been driven from their homes at midnight to face the winter's storm, and to flee from an advancing foe?

But, then, if we have enjoyed such immunity from the actual presence and contact of war, many have lost their friends in battle, and the widow's sighing and the orphan's tear are heard and seen throughout the land. And that is true. Our brothers have fallen—nobly fallen, and many more shall yet fall before this terrible conflict is over. But is there no consolation for all that? Death is always terrible, it is true, but death upon the field of battle loses half its sting. Our brothers have fallen—not in rebellion against a mild and beneficent government, but in its defense; and their voluntary sacrifice of self and life and all that was dear to them on earth, is but the humble following of that greater example of One "who gave himself a ransom for all." Affection will weep for the unreturning brave, but its tears will be assuaged by the remembrance of lofty

achievement and heroic deed. A grateful nation cherishes their memory, unborn generations shall learn to lisp their names, and the liberties of the people shall be their lasting monument. Is there nothing in this to dissipate the terror of death? And shall we weep over our brothers, when their mausoleum is a nation's heart?

There is one other method in which the war reaches us as a chastisement, viz. in respect of financial cost. Hitherto this has assumed the form of voluntary contribution, and never has history recorded so grand a spectacle of merchant-princes and banking institutions coming to the relief of a government. The relief funds, and soldiers' aid societies, and sanitary commissions, and subsistence committees, have done a glorious work—and the people have replenished their coffers so fast as they became exhausted. The springs of liberality were touched by some mysterious influence, and even men who had nothing to give to the cause of God and his church, had hundreds to give to the country. Let us be thankful, at least, that in such cases patriotism could accomplish what piety failed to do.

But the financial cost of the war is rapidly transforming itself into another shape, and the mutterings

of discontent are already heard on account of prospective taxes. That is a phase of our national chastisement which will touch the tenderest spot in many a man's heart—and let us be thankful for it. For there can be no doubt that our deepest national sin is avarice. Making haste to be rich is the all-absorbing life. Greed for gain is our idol, and Mammon too often our god. It is this which lies at the root of the traditional curse of slavery in one portion of the country, and the tyranny of capital over labor in another; and to its fearful growth God is giving us the healthful check in the taxes we shall be called to pay.

And yet there are alleviations even here, for in regard to taxes, two things are absolutely certain: First, that those who have no property will have no tax to pay upon it; and second, those who have property would find but little comfort in that fact, if not protected in its possession by the limitations of justice and the majesty of law.

What if the men of the nation, or even the lawless of the nation, banded together as guerrillas—as they surely would in a state of anarchy—where would be the safety for property, or even for life itself? And if, when we pay our taxes, we remember

that we are paying only for our safety, it will not, I am sure, be so unwelcome a task. Better a man should give the half of all he has and all he gets, than that the whole should be taken ruthlessly from him. Yes, but, it is said, it did not use to cost us taxes for the National Government. No, my friend, it did not, and there was just the difficulty. Men do not prize very highly what costs them nothing! And when we come to the actual and direct support of the Government, we shall appreciate more highly the value of our free institutions and the untold blessings which they bring.

Thus, in one form or another, the chastisement of the sword comes to us all, but as yet it comes with alleviations that temper its severity, as if God were saying to the American people, "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee."

I should be glad, if time permitted, to trace this morning the probable results of the war as a national discipline, and to discern some of the fruits of righteousness which shall be yielded afterward to them which are exercised thereby. I shall merely allude to these in conclusion.

There is no doubt that in addition to the actual

discipline which the war is giving us as a nation, that there are certain truths now being demonstrated, and certain errors refuted, whose final record could be written only in blood. There used to be a motto of commercial life, that Cotton is king. That heresy has been exploded. No *one* staple product can be king. If so, Corn would be king rather than Cotton. But Cotton is not so great a king to-day as Blockade, and the commercial world is learning that it is the just and even balance of the products of a nation—not one staple alone—that constitutes its power. The world can not remain under the dominion of a monopoly, and the utterances of our history are declaring in the hearing of the nations, that man is greater than cotton, and virtue greater than coin. The onward marching of our nation's life, even through the sea of blood, is not the moving of a car of Juggernaut to crush and to destroy; it is rather the onward progress of the chariot of civilization, as it bears humanity to its destined goal.

It is a maxim of church history, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. It is equally true, that the lives of the patriots are the corner-stones of the state. No nation can be strong without heroic memories in the past. It must have its

heroes and its battle songs. It must cherish its memories of struggle and blood and death. Its ballads must recount the achievements of the brave, and mourn their loss. And in a nation's heart, as in an everlasting urn, the names of patriot and hero and warrior must be kept, whose very memory will be an inspiration, and whose quenchless spirit will be a consecrated tie.

And we are making such history to-day. Our patriot brothers are deepening and strengthening the nation's life. From every drop of blood, and from every soldier's grave, new truths shall spring, and higher hopes be born. The foundation of our Government was laid in the wisdom of the Revolutionary fathers, and when its superstructure shall be cemented by the best blood of the land, then, and not till then, will the Government be really strong, and then this national chastisement, which for the present seemeth, indeed, not joyous but rather grievous, shall have yielded the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.

It is recorded in the legends of ancient Rome, that once a chasm opened in the midst of the forum, which soon threatened to engulf the whole city. They sought in vain to fill it, for as they cast in earth,

it still widened. At last the Oracle was consulted for a remedy, and the response was given that the chasm could never be closed until what was most precious in Rome had been cast therein. Instantly the Roman matrons brought their rarest jewels, but still the chasm yawned. The patricians brought forth their treasure, but it refused to be closed; when Marcus Curtius, a tribune of the people, demanded of his countrymen if jewels and wealth were the most precious thing which Rome possessed. Arraying himself in his armor, he mounted his horse, and plunged into the chasm, and it closed over him forever. There was one thing in Rome more precious than treasure or jewels—it was her manhood. Such a chasm has opened in America to-day, and it can never close until the flower of American manhood shall have been offered a sacrifice to its demand. Then it will close, and upon the very spot which now yawns so fearfully, the temple of our liberties will rise statelier and stronger than ever before.

* * * *

There is a darker side to the picture, it is true. A minor chord runs through the anthem of our thanksgiving to-day. There are eyes, whose blind-

ing tears will scarcely permit them to look up to heaven, and hearts whose burden of sorrow will feel no thrill of joy. The festivities and re-unions of the day will be fraught with memories both tender and sad. In ten thousand homes an unreturning son will be remembered, and in many a household there will be a vacant chair that was not vacant a year ago. In the silent recesses of many a heart, to-day, a name will be spoken, and the tenderest love of that heart will find a shrine in some newly-made grave on the bloody field of Manassas, or Shiloh, or Antietam, or amid the dark and tangled swamps of the Peninsula. But though they sleep their last sleep, and have fought their last battle, a Nation cherishes their memories, and repeats their names with the ardor of patriotic love. The liberties we enjoy were purchased by their struggle and toil and death, and from their ashes new hopes are springing, and in their death a greater Future is born.

"To the hero, when his sword
Has won the battle for the free,
Death's voice sounds like a prophet's word;
And in its hollow tones are heard
The thanks of millions yet to be."

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